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MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

A BISQUE-PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

ALFRED KREYMBORG

Author of Lima Beans, Puppet Plays, Plays for Merry Andrews, Rocking Chairs & Other Comedies, There's a Moon Tonight, Troubadour, etc.

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Manikin and Minikin

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FEB 8 1947

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

Seen through an oval frame, one of the walls of a parlor. The wallpaper is a conventionalized pattern. Only the shelf of the mantelpiece shows. At each end, seated on pedestals turned slightly away from one another, two aristocratic bisque figures, a boy in delicate cerise and a girl in cornflower blue. Their shadows join in a grotesque silhouette. In the center, an ancient clock whose tick acts as the metronome for the sound of their high voices. Presently, the mouths of the figures open and shut after the mode of ordinary conversation.

Drama 69p

SHE

Manikin!

HE

Minikin?

SHE

That fool of a servant has done it again.

HE

I should say, she's more than a fool.

SHE

A meddlesome busybody—

HE

A brittle-fingered noddy!

SHE

Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE

The everlasting armchair,
the everlasting tiger skin,
the everlasting yellow, green and purple books,
the everlasting portrait of milord—

SHE

Oh, these Yankees!—and I see
the everlasting rattan rocker,
the everlasting samovar,
the everlasting noisy piano,
the everlasting portrait of milady—

HE

Simpering spectacle!

SHE

What does she want, always dusting?

HE

I should say—
that is, I'd consider the thought—

SHE

You'd consider a lie—
oh, Manikin—
you're trying to defend her!

HE

I'm not defending her—

SHE

You're trying to—

HE

I'm not trying to—

SHE

Then what are you trying to—

HE

Well, I'd venture to say,
if she'd only stay away some morning—

SHE
That's what I say in my dreams!
HE
She and her broom—
SHE
Her everlasting broom—
HE
She wouldn't be sweeping—
SHE
Every corner, every cranny, every crevice—
HE
And the dust wouldn't move—
SHE
Wouldn't crawl, wouldn't rise, wouldn't fly—
HE
And cover us all over—
SHE
Like a spider-web—ugh!
HE
Everlasting dust has been most of our life—
SHE
Everlasting years and years of dust!
HE
You on your lovely blue gown—
SHE
And you on your manly pink cloak.
HE
If she didn't sweep, we wouldn't need dusting—
SHE
Nor need taking down, I should say—
HE
With her stupid, clumsy hands—

SHE

Her crooked, monkey paws—

HE

And we wouldn't need putting back—

SHE

I with my back to you—

HE

I with my back to you. . . .

SHE

It's been hours, days, weeks—
by the sound of that everlasting clock—
and the coming of day and the going of day—
since I saw you last!

HE

What's the use of the sun
with its butterfly wings of light—
what's the use of a sun made to see by—
if I can't see you!

SHE

Manikin!

HE

Minikin?

SHE

Say that again!

HE

Why should I say it again—don't you know?

SHE

I know, but sometimes I doubt—

HE

Why do you, what do you doubt?

SHE

Please say it again!

HE
What's the use of a sun—
SHE
What's the use of a sun?
HE
That was made to see by—
SHE
That was made to see by?
HE
If I can't see you!
SHE
Oh, Manikin!
HE
Minikin?
SHE
If you hadn't said that again,
my doubt would have filled a balloon.
HE
Your doubt, which doubt, what doubt?
SHE
And although I can't move,
although I can't move unless somebody shoves me,
one of these days when the sun isn't here,
I would have slipped over the edge
of this everlasting shelf—
HE
Minikin!
SHE
And fallen to that everlasting floor
into so many fragments,
they'd never paste Minikin together again!
HE
Minikin, Minikin!

SHE

They'd have to set another here—
some Ninikin, I'm assured!

HE

Why do you chatter so, prattle so?

SHE

Because of my doubt—
because I'm as positive as I am
that I sit here with my knees in a knot—
that that human creature—loves you.

HE

Loves me?

SHE

And you her!

HE

Minikin!

SHE

When she takes us down she holds you much longer.

HE

Minikin!

SHE

I'm sufficiently feminine—
and certainly old enough—
I and my hundred and seventy years—
I can see, I can feel
by her manner of touching me
and her flicking me with her mop—
the creature hates me—
she'd like to drop me, that's what she would!

HE

Minikin!

SHE

Don't you venture defending her!

Booby—you don't know live women!
When I'm in the right position
I can note how she fondles you,
pets you like a parrot with her finger tip,
blows a pinch of dust from your eye
with her softest breath,
holds you off at arm's length
and fixes you with her spider look,
actually holds you against her cheek—
her rose-tinted cheek—
before she releases you!
If she didn't turn us apart so often,
I wouldn't charge her with insinuation;
but now I know she loves you—
she's as jealous as I am—
and poor dead me in her live power!
Manikin?

HE

Minikin?

SHE

If you could see me—
the way you see her—

HE

But I see you—
see you always—
see only you!

SHE

If you could see me
the way you see her,
you'd still love me,
you'd love me the way you do her!
Who made me what I am?
Who dreamed me in motionless clay?

HE
Minikin?
SHE
Manikin?
HE
Will you listen to me?
SHE
No!
HE
Will you listen to me?
SHE
No.
HE
Will you listen to me?
SHE
Yes.
HE
I love you—
SHE
No!
HE
I've always love you—
SHE
No.
HE
You doubt that?
SHE
Yes!
HE
You doubt that?
SHE
Yes.

HE

You doubt that?

SHE

No.
You've always loved me—
yes—
but you don't love me now—
no—
not since that rose-face encountered your glance—
no.

HE

Minikin!

SHE

If I could move about the way she can—
if I had feet—
dainty white feet which could twinkle and twirl—
I'd dance you so prettily
you'd think me a sun butterfly—
if I could let down my hair
and prove you it's longer than larch hair—
if I could raise my black brows
or shrug my narrow shoulders,
like a queen or a countess—
if I could turn my head, tilt my head,
this way and that, like a swan—
ogle my eyes, like a peacock,
till you'd marvel,
they're green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold—
if I could move, only move
just the moment of an inch—
you would see what I could be!
It's a change, it's a change,
you men ask of women!

HE

A change?

SHE

You're eye-sick, heart-sick
of seeing the same foolish porcelain thing,
a hundred years old,
a hundred and fifty,
and sixty, and seventy—
I don't know how old I am!

HE

Not an exhalation older than I—
not an inhalation younger!
Minikin?

SHE

Manikin?

HE

Will you listen to me?

SHE

No!

HE

Will you listen to me?

SHE

No.

HE

Will you listen to me?

SHE

Yes.

HE

I don't love that creature—

SHE

You do.

HE

I can't love that creature—

SHE
You can.
HE
Will you listen to me?
SHE
Yes—
if you'll tell me—
if you'll prove me—
so my last particle of dust—
the tiniest speck of a molecule—
the merest electron—
HE
Are you listening?
SHE
Yes!
HE
To begin with—
I dislike, suspect, deplore—
I had best say, feel compassion
for what is called, humanity—
or the animate, as opposed to the inanimate—
SHE
You say that so wisely—
you're such a philosopher—
say it again!
HE
That which is able to move
can never be steadfast, you understand?
Let us consider the creature at hand
to whom you have referred
with an undue excess of admiration
adulterated with an undue excess of envy—

SHE
Say that again!

HE
To begin with—
I can only see part of her at once.
She moves into my vision;
she moves out of my vision;
she is doomed to be wayward.

SHE
Yes, but that which you see of her—

HE
Is ugly, commonplace, unsightly.
Her face a rose-face?—
it's veined with blood and the skin of it wrinkles—
her eyes are ever so near to a hen's—
her movements,
if one would pay such a gait with regard—
her gait is unspeakably ungainly—
her hair—

SHE
Her hair?

HE
Luckily I've never seen it down—
I daresay it comes down in the dark,
when it looks, most assuredly, like tangled weeds—

SHE
Again, Manikin, that dulcet phrase!

HE
Even were she beautiful,
she were never so beautiful as thou!

SHE
Now you're a poet, Manikin!

HE

Even were she so beautiful as thou—
lending her your eyes,
and the exquisite head which holds them—
like a cup two last beads of wine,
like a stone two last drops of rain,
green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold—

SHE

Faster, Manikin!

HE

I can't, Minikin!
Words were never given to man
to phrase such a one as you are—
inanimate symbols
can never embrace, embody, hold
the animate dream that you are—
I must cease.

SHE

Manikin!

HE

And even were she so beautiful as thou,
she couldn't stay beautiful.

SHE

Stay beautiful?

HE

Humans change with each going moment.
That is a gray-haired platitude.
Just as I can see that creature
only when she touches my vision,
so I could only see her once, were she beautiful—
at best, twice or thrice—
you're more precious than when you came!

SHE

And you!

HE

Human pathos penetrates still deeper
when one determines their inner life,
as we've pondered their outer.
Their inner changes far more desperately.

SHE

How so, wise Manikin?

HE

They have what philosophy terms, moods,
and moods are more pervious to modulation
than pools to idle breezes.
These people may say, to begin with—
I love you.
This may be true, I'm assured—
as true as when *we* say, I love you.
But they can only say,
I love you,
so long as the mood breathes,
so long as the breezes blow,
so long as water remains wet.
They are honest—
they mean what they say—
passionately, tenaciously, tragically—
but when the mood languishes,
they have to say,
if it be they are honest—
I do not love you.
Or they have to say,
I love you,
to somebody else.

SHE
To somebody else?
HE
Now, you and I—
we've said that to each other—
we've had to say it
for a hundred and seventy years—
and we'll have to say it, always.
SHE
Say always again!
HE
The life of an animate—
SHE
Say always again!
HE
Always!
The life of an animate
is a procession of deaths
with but a secret sorrowing candle,
guttering lower and lower,
on the path to the grave—
the life of an inanimate
is as serenely enduring—
as all still things are.
SHE
Still things?
HE
Recall our childhood in the English museum—
ere we were moved,
from place to place,
to this dreadful Yankee salon—
do you remember
that little old Greek tanagra

of the girl with a head like a bud—
that little old Roman medallion
of the girl with a head like a—

SHE

Manikin, Manikin—
were they so beautiful as I—
did you love them, too—
why do you bring them back?

HE

They were not so beautiful as thou—
I spoke of them—
recalled, designated them—
well, because they were ages old—
and—and—

SHE

And—and?

HE

And we might live as long as they—
as they did and do!
I hinted their existence
because they're not so beautiful as thou,
so that by contrast and deduction—

SHE

And deduction?

HE

You know what I'd say—

SHE

But say it again!

HE

I love you.

SHE

Manikin?

HE

Minikin?

SHE

Then even though that creature has turned us apart,
can you see me?

HE

I can see you.

SHE

Even though you haven't seen me
for hours, days, weeks—
with your dear blue eyes—
you can see me—
with your hidden ones?

HE

I can see you.

SHE

Even though you are still,
and calm, and smooth,
and lovely outside—
you aren't still and calm
and smooth and lovely inside?

HE

Lovely, yes—
but not still and calm and smooth! . . .

SHE

Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE

I look at you.
I see you.

SHE

And if that fool of a servant—
oh, Manikin—
suppose she should break the future—

our great, happy centuries ahead—
by dropping me, throwing me down?

HE

I should take an immediate step
off this everlasting shelf—

SHE

But you cannot move!

HE

The good wind would give me a blow!

SHE

Now you're a punster!
And what would your fragments do?

HE

They'd do what Manikin did.

SHE

Say that again!

HE

They'd do what Manikin did. . . .

SHE

Manikin?

HE

Minikin?

SHE

Shall I tell you something?

HE

Tell me something.

SHE

Are you listening?

HE

With my inner ears.

SHE

I wasn't jealous of that woman—

HE
You weren't jealous?
SHE
I wanted to hear you talk—
HE
You wanted to hear me talk?
SHE
You talk so wonderfully!
HE
Do I, indeed? What a booby I am!
SHE
And I wanted to hear you say—
HE
You cheat, you idler, you—
SHE
Woman—
HE
Dissembler!
598601
SHE
Manikin?
HE
Minikin?
SHE
Everlastingly?
HE
Everlastingly.
SHE
Say it again!
HE
I refuse—
SHE
You refuse?

HE

Well–

SHE

Well?

HE

You have ears outside your head—
I'll say that for you—
but they'll never hear—
what your other ears hear!

SHE

Say it—
down one of the ears—
outside my head?

HE

I refuse.

SHE

You refuse?

HE

Leave me alone.

SHE

Manikin?

HE

I can't say it!

SHE

Manikin!

[*The clock goes on ticking for a moment. Its mellow chimes strike the hour.*

CURTAIN

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